

# Where was the Blyth spirit?

MOVING around the ground at Loakes Park on Saturday, I was struck by the absence of real humour or passion in the 2,500 crowd. True, they supported Wanderers well (which supporters don't when their team is winning?), but the entertainment on the terraces was confined to hearing Football League results filtering through on Radio 2.

Having watched most of my football in Scotland, I am in little doubt that the absence of alcohol within the ground is responsible for such a muted gathering.

North of the border, the inevitable "carry-oot" adds a third, or even fourth and fifth, dimension to the proceedings, and under such circumstances terracing wags and "characters" thrive.

But, as usual, it is a case of swings and roundabouts. If Loakes Park is not the place to go for a laugh, at least the sobriety of the crowd lessens the possibility of violence on the terraces.

Although the referee asked a constable to keep an eye on the crowd behind the Blyth goal in the first half — did somebody throw a peanut? — I was on the spot at the time and noticed nothing untoward. The crowd were very well behaved throughout.

Naturally, the few Blyth supporters I spoke to were as sick as the proverbial parrot. "Caal this footbaal, moon?" moaned one green and white worthy, who told me he had spent £20 on the day's wasted journey.

I thought Wanderers deserved to win an often scrappy game because they snapped up their few

ALAN CAMPBELL views the Big Match from the terraces.

chances. Also, they were less affected by the recent inactivity than Blyth, and thus gave the impression of being keener and more competitive — a reversal of the usual north v south pattern.

The third factor in Wanderers' favour was their dominance in the air, the source of all three goals. It may sound churlish to say it, but Wanderers might have won by an even bigger margin had they not slung over careless, mis-directed crosses from the wings when under no pressure.

## Rattling

Steve Hardwick was the main offender in this category, spoiling an otherwise impressive performance. I rated Stewart Atkins and Terry Scott as Wanderers' top players because of their consistent success in rattling the big Blyth defenders.

One final paragraph of praise. The catering staff were under siege throughout the interval and the start of the second half, yet provided a steady flow of hot (and reasonably priced) nourishing food.

For the few who are never happy, the dozen unpaid supporters who provide the service sold 35 dozen rolls, 14 lbs of bacon, 10 lbs of sausage and 20 gallons of water for tea and coffee. Thanks to all concerned.

match



Jubilant Wycombe fans celebrate their side's first goal against Blyth Spartans on Saturday.